**The Making of a Democrat Kingmaker** By ARTHUR J. PAIS 10/23/2000

Dinesh Sastry remembers meeting presidential candidate Michael Dukakis
at a rally at Golden Gate Bridge twelve years ago—and deciding to work
for him. “I wasn’t assigned to do it,” Sastry recalls. “I was a
volunteer for the San Mateo County Democrats. My friend and I showed up
and crossed these ‘please do not cross’ boundaries. The organizers
thought we were sent in by the party and put us to work.”  “We went in
and started coordinating the press corps. I was assigned to be the
liaison with the Secret Service. [Hollywood stars] Ted Danson and Daryl
Hannah were the two hosts, and [ABC correspondent] Sam Donaldson was
there. They gave me a walkie-talkie. I was plugged in right in there,
it was so exciting.  “I wrote about it in my Berkeley application, and
everyone in my high school got a kick out of it. The organizers never
figured it out. They just thanked us and gave us passes for another
meeting.” There are many people including the current presidential
candidate Al Gore who thank Sastry today.

 At 29, Sastry has appeared as one of the savviest political operators in America. Sastry, who is
pursuing a law degree at Georgetown University, already has a degree in
engineering and computer science from University of California at
Berkeley.  In recent months, Sastry, who honed his political skills
during his college days campaigning for the rebel Democratic
presidential candidate Jerry Brown, has emerged as one of the most
respected of young Democrats. A board member of Democratic Leadership
2000, he is also a superb fund-raiser. In the last three months, fund-
raisers organized by him at the homes of Sabeer Bhatia and Dr. Anand
Mahal in California have raised nearly $1.6 million. While Vice
President Al Gore wined and dined at Bhatia’s home, Bill Clinton was
the chief guest at latter’s. “I believe raising money also makes it
easier to lobby for causes that are close to us here—and in India,”
Sastry says. “When we raised about $1 million at Dr. Mahal’s home, we
proved once for all that Indian Americans are serious fund- raisers. “Indians can be represented as much as they want to. Like Wall Street, they’ll take us because we’re good.”

 Sastry recently spoke with thinkIndia.

 **Q. What inspiration have you received from your father and
grandfather?**

**A.** My Grandfather, D. V. Subba Rao, was an eminent
criminal lawyer, legislator, and freedom fighter from Andhra Pradesh.
He was instrumental in the creation of Andhra Pradesh from Madras
state. He was a powerful orator, and mass leader, and always charted an
independent course. He was dedicated to the upliftment of the poor, and
people said he “roared like a lion” as he was fearless on the political
stage or in court. He was an authority on Shakespeare and Milton and
often incorporated their thoughts into his speeches and arguments. I
think by hearing stories of his life, I’ve subconsciously become more
appreciative of the struggles of the common man and the poor, and
learned to be fearless. My interest in politics and law was born out of
these stories. His life is fabled in the East Godavari region of Andhra
Pradesh.  My father Durvasula Sastry is equally fearless and also a
powerful orator. He is very independent but has founded and been in
charge of more Indian American social, political, and cultural
organizations than anyone in the country. His 40 years in the U.S.A.
mirrors the development of the community. He is a devoted servant to
the community, building lasting institutions and not seeking wealth or
personal gain. I am much more ambitious and cautious about how things
affect my well-being and future than he ever was. He is Gandhian in
every sense, even spending his childhood spinning his own threads as
part of the freedom struggle. He can’t eat mango now, because he is not
used to the taste as he never tried it when he was young because he
felt the cost was too high and that several people could be fed with
the cost of a mango.

**Q. You are beholden to former Governor Jerry
Brown. But Brown in recent years has turned against the establishment.
And you raise funds from the Silicon Valley bigwigs.**

**A**. Jerry Brown put many of the early Silicon Valley bigwigs, such as the founders of
Sun Microsystems, on important boards and commissions. The rest of
America looked at the high tech world as dominated by eccentrics and
weirdoes. He brought them (high-tech pioneers) into government and
promoted tax breaks to companies with less than 300 employees in the
1970s to spur innovations and the formation of startup companies. If
corporations and entrepreneurs are driving our global economy and are
capable of creating public opinion, investing capital, and creating
vital jobs, then there is nothing wrong with courting them and letting
them know in what ways they can help achieve a better society. Silicon
Valley bigwigs tend to be more politically and culturally diverse and
open minded than the rest of corporate America. You cannot put them in
a box and write them off as the establishment. Many of them achieved
wealth and power in unique and unorthodox ways, hence the diverse
experiences that mould diverse opinions.  Brown always attacked the
entrenched political system which is beholden to corporate greed and
lobbyists of multinational companies who are beholden to international
financial markets and the need to maximize profits and not loyal to any
one community. He believes that government and the global economy must
be organized in an efficient, elegant manner which is not tainted by
selfish special interests but are more responsive. This would result in
less inequity, less waste, more transparency and predictability and
generally more opportunity. The chain is only as strong as the weakest
link, and thus, I like the way Brown throws away conservative and
liberal labels, and chooses ideas that lead to radical reform,
progress, and efficiency.

**Q. Would be you be interested in running for
public office?**

**A.** If I thought I could legitimately win and if elected,
and could maximize my contribution to society, considering the skills I
possess, the opportunities I have, and the situation I’m in at the time
… I think I would prefer an open seat and a winnable seat. But perhaps
it would be more fun using the contacts I have, the experience I have
accumulated to work with others in promoting the candidacies of five or
six people throughout America. Perhaps the Democratic Party could help
nurture the early careers of several promising Indian Americans around

the country already involved in local politics of their area. I would
have to see what would be more fulfilling.